

HOBBS AND THE ABSOLUTE STATE

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with it the right to test his actions by the measure in which they secured that object. If dissatisfaction reaches a certain pitch it is bound to find expression. There are some things which men cannot and will not bear.

Ckrendon speaks contemptuously of Hobbes's notorious ignorance of the law and constitution of England, and indeed the spirit is rather that of a continental than a British publicist. It is characteristic that he has no use either for what we call fundamental laws, with their peculiarly sacred character, or for Common Law, one of the pillars of the temple of liberty. He would have welcomed the Philosophic Despots of the eighteenth century such as Frederick the Great. His mind was as unhistorical as that of Bentham and the rationalists of 1789. Nearly all his historical illustrations are drawn from the classics and the Old Testament, in other words from conditions which had long passed away. His contention that there 'is and must be an absolute sovereign in every state is historically incorrect. There was no sovereignty in his sense in the Middle Ages, when power was divided between Church and State, between King and his feudatories. There was no effective sovereignty in the Holy Roman Empire. Mixed government has often produced disappointing results, but to pretend that it always involves anarchy is nonsense.

Apart from his historical delusions and psychological paradoxes, the weakest part of the system is that it allows the State no positive function. As the offspring of fear, its sole duty, apart from defence against foreign enemies, is the maintenance of order. Leviathan is simply a policeman of superhuman size with a truncheon in his hand. Though Hobbes was an ardent admirer of Thucydides, he had no eye for the Periclean ideal of the city or the state as a work of art; no inkling of

Burke's noble conception of an association in all science, in all art, in all perfection; no anticipation of our twentieth-century axiom that every citizen should have his or her share of opportunity and responsibility. His state is a necessary evil, an organ of coercion, not an indispensable instrument for the attainment of a free and progressive civilization. It is the continental ideal of absolutism which lingered on till the French Revolution and in some countries even longer, not freedom slowly browning down from precedent to precedent and conscience emancipating itself from external authority. Though the system as a whole is little to our English taste, there are a few connecting links with the democracies of the